

## REMARKS

Applicants have amended claims 1 and 7 to further define the pad recited in the claims as well as to improve English usage. Claim 5 has been amended to improve English usage as well.

Claims 1, 2, 6 and 7 have been rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 5,584,475 (Asada). Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection.

Claim 1 as amended recites a pad comprising a lower layer made of a flexible material and an upper layer disposed on the lower layer and made of a rigid material. The claim also states that the pad is configured within the apparatus so that sheets traveling between the driver roller and the pad do not come in contact with a flexible material that has a kinetic friction coefficient higher than the rigid material of the upper layer. This amendment finds support, for example, at page 7, lines 13-25, and FIGS. 1 and 2 of the application. A structure that voids contact between the traveling sheets and a flexible material with a high friction coefficient eliminates variations in traveling speed of the sheets otherwise observed as shown in FIG. 4B. See, page 10, lines 10-15, and FIG. 4A of the application.

The Examiner contends that Asada's support element 45 corresponds to the claimed lower layer and Asada's noise deadening control portion 26 to the claimed upper layer. However, Asada's holder member 5 having the support element 45 and the noise deadening control portion 26 does not correspond to the claimed pad. Asada's support element 45 is "made of the same material as the separation pad 5A." See column 6, lines 11-12, of Asada. Asada's separation pad 5A is made of a foamed urethane resin. Asada's device has the foamed urethane resin, which is the flexible material of Asada's lower layer 45, exposed on the surface of holder member 5 so that Asada's sheets come in contact with the foamed urethane resin 5A at its "upstream" position. See column 5, lines 49-52, and FIG. 4 of Asada.

Asada states at column 7, lines 9-12, that the support element 45 and the separation pad 5A are not necessarily made of the same material. However, Asada still requires that the separation pad 5A, which is in contact with the sheets, have a friction coefficient higher than the noise deadening control portion 26, which the Examiner equates to the claimed upper layer.

Thus, Asada does not teach or suggest the claim limitation that the sheets traveling between the driver roller and the pad do not come in contact with a flexible material that has a kinetic friction coefficient higher than the rigid material of the upper layer.

Claim 7 as amended recites one structure that realizes the limitation of claim 1 described above and is supported by FIG. 2 of the application.

The rejection of claims 1, 2, 6 and 7 under 35 USC 103(a) on Asada should be withdrawn because Asada does not teach or suggest the invention as a whole.

The remaining rejection relies on Asada and thus should be withdrawn as well because Asada does not provide the teachings for which it is cited.

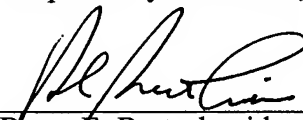
In light of the above, a Notice of Allowance is solicited.

In the event that the transmittal letter is separated from this document and the Patent and Trademark Office determines that an extension and/or other relief is required, applicants petition for any required relief including extensions of time and authorize the Commissioner to charge the cost of such petitions and/or other fees due in connection with the filing of this document to **Deposit Account No. 03-1952**, referencing Docket No. **204552029100**.

Respectfully submitted,

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